

Holmes and Wyer Carpenters Shop,
also known as Benjamin Gardner Store
On north side of Straight Wharf
Nantucket
Nantucket County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-913

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HOLMES AND WYER CARPENTERS SHOP, also known as Benjamin Gardner Store

Location: On north side of Straight Wharf (east of Macy Warehouse), Nantucket, Massachusetts

Present Owner: Sherburne Associates

Present Occupant: Straight Wharf Theatre

Present Use: Theatre

Brief Statement of Significance: One of the warehouses erected on Straight Wharf immediately after the Great Fire of 1846.

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PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1846 -- Daniel Jones, "merchant," owned a ships' supply store here up to 1846 when it was destroyed by fire. Daniel Jones died of consumption in 1848.
- 1849 -- Charles F. Winslow, physician, bought the land from Henry H. Jones, son of Daniel Jones.
- 1849 -- Benjamin Gardner 4th, who had built a store here right after the fire of 1846, bought the land under his store from Dr. Winslow for \$250, three days after the doctor had bought it.
- 1866 -- Joseph B. Macy bought from heirs of Benjamin Gardner "land with store thereon."
- 1888 -- William T. Swain bought from Rebecca M. Macy, widow of Joseph B. Macy. Joseph B. Macy at one time owned considerable property on both sides of Straight Wharf, most of which was sold to William T. Swain. During this time, it is believed, the building was used by Holmes and Wyer as a carpenter shop.
- 1905 -- Byron E. Pease and John K. Ayers bought from heirs of William T. Swain.
- 1929 -- John K. Ayers Land Courted property.
- 1937 -- Frederick C. Ayers et al inherited property.

1940 -- Robert and Margaret Fawcett Wilson bought
from Frederick C. Ayers et al.

1955 -- Margaret Fawcett Wilson owned.

1966 -- Island Service Company, Inc. owned.

1966 to date -- Sherburne Associates.

(Abstract, Records Registry of Deeds, Nantucket,
Massachusetts)

2. Date of erection: Between 1846 and 1849 (Abstract, Deed Book 48, Page 194, which reads "... said Benjamin (Gardner) has built a store thereon since the fire of 1846.")
3. Architect: None.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: No plans known. Small wooden building with two stories, built to house ships' stores. Double doors on second floor used to hoist these supplies from the water side of Straight Wharf, known as Still Dock.
5. Alterations and additions: In 1905, under the ownership of Pease and Ayers, the building was used as storage for the carriage business. A cement floor was installed for the purpose of washing these carriages. The east end was partitioned off and this small space was used by William H. Barret as a tin shop, using the present Theatre entrance door.

When the building was converted for use as a theatre in 1939, the second floor was cut back, leaving the present balcony. A stage and proscenium were built at the west end which at first had two columns and an arch. These columns were brought from the Siasconset home of the famous actor, George Fawcett. They were later removed and are at present under the stage. A wing was added to the north to be used as a dressing-room, at first with only one story and some time later with an added second story.

At this time the building next on the east side was in use as Killen's ice house. It was soon torn down and another built there.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: Straight Wharf, on which this building is situated, is the old wharf in Nantucket, built in 1723 by Richard Macy.

Daniel Jones not only lost this store building in the Great Fire of 1846, but eight years previously, in 1838, he had suffered the total loss of his candle factory when fire

destroyed everything between Union Street and the harbor, a locality which at this time was covered with oil factories and oil sheds (Abstract, Inquirer and Mirror, Jan. 2, 1897)

In 1849 Dr. Charles F. Winslow bought several pieces of property from the heirs of Daniel Jones, one piece being the land under the present theatre building. The name of Dr. Winslow is now famous because of the fact that in accordance with his will, his body was cremated but his heart buried in Nantucket. Over the grave is the inscription "The Heart of Dr. Charles F. Winslow Lies Buried Here". (Abstract, Historic Nantucket, October 1963)

Straight Wharf Theatre was established in 1939 by Robert and Margaret Fawcett Wilson who for several years presented plays written and produced by themselves. Later, professional companies from New York presented plays in the summer, and in winter the Theatre Work Shop, a local organization, carried out a program of amateur performances. This is continued at the present time.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Water color by W. Channing Cabot, "Straight Wharf in 1899", owned by Mrs. Hugh W. Sanford, and reproduced on cover of Historic Nantucket, October, 1962; photographs in Aerial Views of Nantucket, Mass. 1926 by Henry Lang; photographs taken before changes made in 1939 in Scrapbook owned by Mrs. Margaret Fawcett Barnes.

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin
Nantucket, Massachusetts
July, 1967

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Typical mid-nineteenth century wood frame commercial building, built as store, later used as a carpenter shop; presently used as a theatre for live productions.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair; extensively reworked to accommodate theatre functions.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 31' - 0 1/4" by 51' - 9 3/4", not including modern appendage, northwest corner.
2. Foundations: Obscured by grade conditions, inaccessible.

3. Wall construction: Weathered shingles on wood siding, post and stud framing; cornerboards.
4. Structural system: Post and lintel.
5. Exterior stairway: L-shaped wood stair from balcony to ground level.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: All doorways appear to have been reworked except for double doors in north and south elevation at earlier second floor level; vertical and diagonal board doors.
 - b. Windows: Variety of window styles, mostly six-over-six single hung; no shutters.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape and covering: Gable, asphalt shingles.
 - b. Framing: Simple rafter, beam and king post framing.
 - c. Eaves, cornice: Boxed eave, wood gutter, simple board cornice; barge board of wood strip at gable.

C. Description of Interior:

Interior spaces have been completely reworked to accommodate theatre functions, including removal of the second floor, addition of a balcony, stage and modern appendage providing dressing room and a green room. There are no finishes or elements of any architectural or historical significance remaining in the structure.

D. Site and Surroundings:

The Holmes and Wyer Carpenters Shop is located on the north side of Lower Main Street on Straight Wharf. To the west is the Macy Warehouse (MASS-914). The building's chief contribution is that of providing continuity of scale and texture to the street facade.

Prepared by F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A.
Nantucket, Massachusetts
July, 1971

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the 1967 Historic American Buildings Survey summer project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. This is the second project of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Measured drawings prepared under the supervision of Eugene George, A.I.A. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Architectural description prepared by Professor F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A. (University of Florida). Photographs are by Jack E. Boucher of Linwood, New Jersey. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, July 1971.